



# Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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For Immediate Release  
Friday, September 30, 2005

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## **Baucus Continues Push For Katrina Health Package**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) Today, U.S. Senator Max Baucus, ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, led the debate on the Senate floor urging passage of S. 1716, the Emergency Health Care Relief Act. Baucus drafted the legislation with Chairman Grassley of the Senate Finance Committee. Senator Baucus' comments on the Senate floor follow:

{12:42 pm} { NOT AN OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT }

MR. BAUCUS: MR. PRESIDENT, THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 1.5 MILLION INDIVIDUALS WHO SURVIVED HURRICANE KATRINA AND ARE NOW SCATTERED ACROSS THE ENTIRE NATION. THE STORIES OF WHAT THEY HAVE ALREADY EXPERIENCED ARE HARROWING. THEY ARE -- THEIR SUFFERING AND DEPRIVATION ARE BEYOND WHAT MANY OF US COULD IMAGINE, AND THEIR NEEDS, ESPECIALLY FOR HEALTH CARE SERVICES, ARE GREATER THAN MOST OF US HOPED TO EVER KNOW.

TODAY I COME TO THE FLOOR TO SHARE JUST A FEW STORIES OF THOSE SURVIVORS AND THE PROBLEMS THAT THEY ARE FACING IN GETTING THE HEALTH SERVICES THEY NEED. THE HEALTH SERVICES THAT THEY NEED. MANY ARE UNINSURED, WITHOUT MEANS TO PAY FOR FOOD AND SHELTER, LET ALONE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS OR A DOCTOR'S VISIT.

AS I SAID WHEN I SPOKE ON THE SENATE FLOOR ON A WEDNESDAY NIGHT, ONE IN THREE SURVIVORS WHO HAVE APPLIED FOR MEDICAID IN LOUISIANA HAVE BEEN TURNED AWAY. WHY? BECAUSE THEY DON'T MEET MEDICAID'S TRADITIONAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA. THESE PEOPLE NEED HELP. THE GRASSLEY-BAUCUS BILL WOULD DELIVER IT TO THEM WITHOUT DELAY, WITHOUT UNCERTAINTY.

AS WE CONSIDER MOVING FORWARD ON THIS LEGISLATION, I WANT TO REMIND MY COLLEAGUES OF THE FACES OF THOSE WE ARE TRYING TO HELP.

THE SURVIVORS OF HURRICANE KATRINA ARE PEOPLE LIKE EUGENE JOHNSON, AGE 57, RETIRED PLUMBER, DIABETIC, LOST HIS HOME IN KATRINA. HE, HIS WIFE, AND FOUR OF HIS FIVE CHILDREN HAVE MOVED FROM SHELTER TO SHELTER. HE NEEDS EYE MEDICINE THAT HE LEFT BEHIND IN NEW ORLEANS. BUT HE COULD NOT AFFORD THE \$119 COST OF THE PRESCRIPTION. WITHOUT HIS MEDICINE, HE WILL GO BLIND. AN AID GROUP, THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH FUND, PROVIDED HIM THE MEDICINE, BUT RESPONDED WITH THESE WORDS "WE'RE A STOPGAP. NOTHING MORE."

MAUDE JORDAN, WHO SLEPT ON TOP OF HER [REFRIGERATOR FOR THREE DAYS BEFORE BEING RESCUED FROM NEW ORLEANS. PENNILESS AND DIABETIC, SHE WAS TAKEN TO A RELIEF CENTER IN BATON ROUGE. HER APPLICATION WAS REJECTED BY MEDICAID, HOWEVER, BECAUSE SHE WAS "UNABLE TO ESTABLISH ELIGIBILITY BECAUSE CANNOT ESTABLISH CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY." GIVE ME A] BREAK. SHE NEEDS HELP NOW. THAT'S WHAT OUR BILL DOES.

DWAYNE RUSE, 44, LIVED INDEPENDENTLY IN A SPECIALLY-OUTFITTED APARTMENT IN NEW ORLEANS AND MANEUVERED AN ELECTRIC WHEELCHAIR. HE LOST HIS WHEELCHAIR WHEN HE WAS EVACUATED TO GEORGIA AND WAS PLACED IN A NURSING HOME. THE LOCAL DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY AT A SPECIALTY HOSPITAL AND REHABILITATION CENTER HELPED HIM OUT, BUT STATED -- QUOTE -- " DWAYNE IS JUST ONE PERSON, BUT HE DEMONSTRATES THERE'S LOTS OF PEOPLE OUT THERE IN THE SAME PREDICAMENT WHO ARE NOT GET THE HELP THEY NEED."

TOM LEYNES, AGE 49, WAS A CARPENTER WITH AN APARTMENT JUST OFF THE BEACH, A HAPPY FAMILY MAN. AFTER KATRINA, HE FOUND THE BODIES OF HIS TWO LITTLE GIRLS HOLDING HANDS. NOW HE'S STRUGGLING WITH DEPRESSION, LIVING IN A TENT, TAKING MEDICATION, TRYING TO DEAL WITH THE PAIN. HE NEEDS HELP.

THERESA BIELLER, 39, GULFPORT, MISSISSIPPI, WAS FOLLOWING A 15-PILL REGIMEN FOR A HEART PROBLEM AND OTHER CONDITIONS BEFORE THE STORM. MOST OF HER PRESCRIPTIONS WERE ALREADY LOW OR EMPTY. SHE HAD NO ELECTRICITY TO OPERATE A NEBULIZER FOR HER 2-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER CHLOE. HER CHEST PAIN AND WEAKNESS MOUNTING, BIELLER CHECKED INTO A HOSPITAL. SHE CAME OUT THE NEXT DAY WITH A MERE THREE-DAY SUPPLY, NOT 15. SHE HAS NO INSURANCE, LITTLE CASH TO BUY THE EXPENSIVE DRUGS. SHE NEEDS HELP.

"PRECIOUS" IS THE NAME GIVEN BY NURSING HOME STAFF TO AN ELDERLY WOMAN EVACUATED TO TENNESSEE. PRECIOUS BECAUSE SHE CAN'T REMEMBER HER NAME. PRECIOUS CAN TALK, BUT SHE'S UNABLE TO TELL STAFF WHO SHE IS OR WHAT HER HEALTH CARE PROBLEMS ARE. SHE SPENT FOUR DAYS IN A HOSPITAL BEFORE BECOMING A RESIDENT AT BORDEAUX LONG-TERM CARE. HOW HER CARE WILL BE PAID FOR IS UNKNOWN.

THESE SURVIVORS AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS LIKE THEM ARE WAITING FOR CONGRESS TO ACT. TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY CAN GET THE HEALTH CARE SERVICES THEY NEED, AND THEY CANNOT AFFORD ANOTHER MOMENT FOR THIS ASSISTANCE AND NEITHER CAN WE. THEY CAN'T WAIT. I URGE MY COLLEAGUES TO JOIN ME IN SUPPORTING THIS MOTION, WHICH I'LL NOW OFFER FOR UNANIMOUS CONSENT ON THE GRASSLEY-BAUCUS EMERGENCY HEALTH CARE RELIEF ACT.

MR. PRESIDENT, I ASK UNANIMOUS CONSENT THAT THE SENATE PROCEED TO THE IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION OF CALENDER NUMBER 214, S. 1716, WITH THE GRASSLEY-BAUCUS SUBSTITUTE BILL, WHICH IS AT THE DESK, BE AGREED TO AND, THE BILL BE READ A THIRD TIME AN PASSED, THE MOTION TO RECONSIDER BE LAID UPON THE TABLE, AND THAT ALL THIS OCCUR WITH NO INTERVENING ACTION OR DEBATE.

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THE PRESIDING OFFICER: IS THERE OBJECTION?

MR. SUNUNU: MR. PRESIDENT?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: OBJECTION IS HEARD.

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MR. BAUCUS: MR. PRESIDENT?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER: THE SENATOR FROM MONTANA.

MR. BAUCUS: MR. PRESIDENT, I KNOW THAT ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE STATE OF ARKANSAS ALREADY KNOW HOW MUCH THEIR SENATOR FIGHTS FOR THEM. I JUST WANTED TO STATE MY PERSPECTIVE. THE SENATOR FROM ARKANSAS IS ONE OF THE BEST. SHE'S A BELIEVER. SHE FIGHTS FOR HER PEOPLE, AND ALL OF US ARE VERY GRATEFUL FOR THAT.

MR. PRESIDENT, I WOULD JUST LIKE TO MAKE A COUPLE, THREE POINTS ABOUT THIS. ONE IS THIS LEGISLATION TO HELP HEALTH CARE NEEDS OF EVACUEES AND VICTIMS ON ACCOUNT OF KATRINA IS DESPERATELY NEEDED, AND IT IS GOING TO PASS. IT'S JUST A QUESTION OF WHEN THAT WILLFUL BAND OF THREE OR FOUR SENATORS IS GOING TO RECOGNIZE THAT SO WE CAN GET ON WITH IT AND HELP SOME PEOPLE WHO REALLY NEED SOME HELP. THAT IS WHAT THIS REALLY COMES DOWN TO.

YOU HEAR A COUPLE COMPLAINTS ABOUT THIS LEGISLATION. LET ME JUST BRIEFLY EXPLAIN WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT. BASICALLY THIS IS AN EFFORT TO HELP PEOPLE. IT'S A MODEST EFFORT. IT'S LEGISLATION DESIGNED BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE, SENATOR GRASSLEY, REPUBLICAN, AND MYSELF, THE RANKING DEMOCRAT. WE'VE WORKED WITH ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE. WE'VE WORKED WITH THE STAFFS OF THE COMMITTEES. WE'VE WORKED WITH SENATORS OF STATES DIRECTLY AFFECTED, ASKING THEIR VIEWS.

IT'S BALANCED. IT'S NOT NEARLY AS EXTREME AS [WHAT] SOME HAVE SUGGESTED -- SOME OTHER SENATORS. I MIGHT SAY THAT A COUPLE OF THE SENATORS BACKED OFF IT TO OFFER THE LEGISLATION ON THE PROMISE WE IN THE FINANCE COMMITTEE WOULD COME UP WITH A BILL, A BALANCED BILL, SENATOR GRASSLEY AND MYSELF, TO BRING THAT BILL TO THE FLOOR. HERE WE ARE A COUPLE WEEKS LATER. WE IN THE FINANCE COMMITTEE DID OUR PART. IT IS UP TO THE SENATE TO DO THEIR PART AND TAKE UP THIS BILL AND PASS THIS BILL.

RECOGNIZING THAT THIS IS ONLY TEMPORARY, MR. PRESIDENT. THIS IS ONLY TEMPORARY RELIEF. ONLY TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE TO THE HEALTH CARE NEEDS OF PEOPLE IN LOUISIANA AND ARKANSAS, ALABAMA, THE STATES AFFECTED. THIS IS NOT PERMANENT. BY TEMPORARY, I ONLY MEAN ABOUT FIVE MONTHS. MY GOSH, MR. PRESIDENT, BY THE TIME WE GET THIS ENACTED, YOU KNOW, VIRTUALLY A MONTH WILL HAVE ALREADY PASSED. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT FIVE MONTHS LEGISLATION -- FIVE MONTHS DURATION OF THIS LEGISLATION.

SOME ARE CONCERNS, WELL, GEE, THIS IS AN ADDITIONAL ENTITLEMENT, IT'S MORE MONEY, IT'S AN ENTITLEMENT. WELL, I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT IN OUR COUNTRY, WE HAVE A PROGRAM CALLED MEDICAID. WHAT IS MEDICAID? MEDICAID IS OUR SAFETY NET. IT'S REALLY THE LAST RESORT FOR PEOPLE GETTING HEALTH CARE IF THEY CAN'T AFFORD IT OTHERWISE AND DON'T HAVE IT OTHERWISE. THEY CAN'T GET IT AT THEIR PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT, THEY'RE NOT WEALTHY, SO THEY CAN'T BUY HEALTH INSURANCE, SO IT'S JUST -- WE HAVE SOMETHING CALLED MEDICAID. IT'S HEALTH CARE FOR LOW-INCOME PEOPLE, PEOPLE WHO JUST DON'T HAVE MUCH MONEY WHATSOEVER. IT'S KIND OF A SAFETY NET TO CATCH PEOPLE WHO OTHERWISE WOULD FALL BETWEEN THE CRACKS.

IT'S REALLY DIRECTLY DESIGNED TO PEOPLE WHO ARE AFFECTED BY KATRINA. SO MANY PEOPLE IN LOUISIANA AND ALL THESE STATES DON'T HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE. THEY JUST DON'T HAVE IT. THEY DON'T HAVE IT FOR SEVERAL REASONS. ONE, THEY COULDN'T AFFORD IT OR THEY WORK FOR SMALL BUSINESSES WHICH, AS WE KNOW, HAS A HARDER TIME

PROVIDING HEALTH INSURANCE, OR THEIR BUSINESSES LAID THEM OFF SO THEY DON'T HAVE THE HEALTH INSURANCE, DON'T HAVE THE INCOME. WHATEVER REASON, THEY DON'T HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE. AND THEY NEED HEALTH CARE NOW, ESPECIALLY DIABETICS, ESPECIALLY PEOPLE WHO NEED DIALYSIS, ESPECIALLY SENIORS OR MAYBE NOT SENIORS WHO HAVE VERY DEFINITE IMMEDIATE EXTRAORDINARY HEALTH NEEDS. ONE OUT OF THREE MEDICAID APPLICATIONS IN . . . LOUISIANA, HAVE BEEN TURNED DOWN BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T MEET THE CRITERIA.

AND THE CRITERIA, AS WE KNOW TODAY, ARE PRETTY LOW. . . . OR I MIGHT SAY IT DIFFERENTLY, . . . IT'S DIFFICULT TO GET ON MEDICAID IF YOU HAVE A SIGNIFICANT INCOME OR JUST SOME INCOME, IF YOU HAVE SOME ASSETS, IF YOU HAVE . . . SOME ASSETS AND SOME INCOME, YOU DON'T GET HEALTH CARE. SO WE'RE SAYING LET'S RAISE THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA A LITTLE BIT. IT IS SAME MEASURES WE PROVIDED FOR VICTIMS OF -- THE SAME MEASURE WE PROVIDED FOR VICTIMS OF 9/11, IT'S THE SAME PROVISION. THE INCOME LEVELS ARE INCREASED ONLY VERY MODESTLY, VERY SLIGHTLY, AND THE CATEGORIES THAT ARE COVERED ARE VIRTUALLY THE SAME. SO I ASKED MYSELF, I ASK MY COLLEAGUES, IF THE SURVIVORS OF 9/11 COULD GET THIS KIND OF MEDICAID HEALTH CARE INSURANCE, WHY IN THE WORLD CAN'T PEOPLE WHO ARE AFFECTED BY KATRINA GET THE SAME? IT'S THE SAME. THE PEOPLE IN NEW YORK CITY GOT HELP RIGHT AWAY, AND IT WAS PASSED VERY QUICKLY. WHY CAN'T THE PEOPLE OF LOUISIANA, ARKANSAS, THE PEOPLE IN MISSISSIPPI, ALABAMA GET THE SAME COVERAGE? IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE TO ME, MR. PRESIDENT.

NOW, . . . THE KIND OF CATCH-ALL OBJECTION I HEARD EARLIER TODAY WAS, WELL, GEE, THIS ISN'T QUITE RIGHT. IT'S NOT THE BEST. WELL, THERE'S NEVER GOING TO BE "THE BEST." WE ALL KNOW IT'S OFTEN IMPORTANT TO NOT LET PERFECTION BE THE ENEMY OF THE GOOD. IS IT GOING TO BE PERFECT? NO. IS IT VERY, VERY GOOD? YES. CAN WE ADJUST IT AND CHANGE IT IF WE NEED TO MAKE SOME CHANGES? CERTAINLY. BUT LET'S BEGIN.

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY, MR. PRESIDENT. IT'S A BIT REMINISCENT -- AND I DON'T WANT TO BE TOO MELODRAMATIC ABOUT THIS, BUT WE'VE HAD CRISIS IN OUR NATION'S PAST, WHETHER IT'S PEARL HARBOR OR SPUTNIK, WHATEVER IT MIGHT BE, THIS CONGRESS REACTED VERY QUICKLY TO THESE CRISES. WELL, THIS, TOO, IS A CRISIS FOR THESE PEOPLE IN THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY. WE NEED TO ACT AS QUICKLY. IT'S A CRISIS FOR THEM. AND IF WE DON'T ACT, MANY PEOPLE ARE NOT GOING TO GET THE HEALTH CARE THEY NEED. OR, TO PUT IT DIFFERENTLY, THEY'RE GOING TO BE BURDENED BY THE ADDITIONAL CONCERN ABOUT WHETHER THEY'RE GOING TO GET THEIR HEALTH CARE, WHETHER THEY'RE COVERED UNDER MEDICAID, WHETHER IT'S GOING TO BE THERE. ADDED TO ALL THE OTHER PROBLEMS THAT THEY HAVE -- WHERE ARE THEY GOING TO LIVE, WHERE ARE SOME OF THEIR LOST LOVED ONES, WHERE -- WHAT'S NEXT FOR THEM, ARE THEY GOING TO BE ABLE TO MAKE THE CAR PAYMENTS, THE HOUSE PAYMENTS -- I MEAN, THE PROBLEMS OF THE PEOPLE OF LOUISIANA AND THESE STATES ARE COMING UP WITH ARE JUST INCREDIBLE. WHY CAN'T WE THEN JUST IN A SMALL WAY HELP WITH HEALTH CARE?

NOW, I'VE HEARD THE OBJECTION, WELL, YOU KNOW, GEE, SENATOR, YOUR LEGISLATION DOES NOT ALLOW A REDUCTION IN FMAP PAYMENTS TO 29 STATES. AND AFTER ALL, THERE ARE MORE THAN 29 STATES, THAT'S A LOT OF STATES. THERE ARE ONLY ABOUT THREE OR FOUR OR FIVE, SIX, SEVEN STATES THAT ARE MOST AFFECTED. LET ME EXPLAIN THIS, MR. PRESIDENT.

CURRENTLY, THE SCHEDULED REDUCTION IN . . . FEDERAL PAYMENTS TO STATES, IT'S CALLED FMAP, IT'S JUST IRRESPECTIVE OF KATRINA, IT'S IN THE LAW. IT'S BECAUSE CERTAIN STATES A FEW YEARS AGO HAD HIGHER INCOMES BECAUSE OF AVERAGING AND DATA LAGS, THE INFORMATION IS REALLY QUITE DATED. BUT THE POINT IS, THIS LEGISLATION SAYS, OKAY, FOR THOSE 29 STATES THAT ARE GOING TO HAVE AUTOMATICALLY THEIR FEDERAL PAYMENTS

TO STATES COVER MEDICARE DROP, WE'RE SAYING THEY WON'T DROP TEMPORARILY. WE'RE NOT INCREASING THE FEDERAL PAYMENT TO STATES. WE'RE NOT INCREASING IT AT ALL. WE'RE JUST SAYING IT WON'T DROP FOR 29 STATES THAT ARE OTHERWISE SCHEDULED TO DROP TEMPORARILY. I THINK IT'S A YEAR -- FOR A YEAR'S TERM.

WELL, WHY IS THAT SO IMPORTANT? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT NOT TO LET FEDERAL PAYMENTS DROP TO THOSE STATES? MR. PRESIDENT, IT'S PRETTY SIMPLE. THESE ARE STATES WHICH HAVE A LOT OF ADDITIONAL COSTS, A LOT OF EVACUEES ARE GOING TO THESE STATES. MANY, MANY ARE GOING TO THESE STATES WHICH PUTS AN ADDITIONAL BURDEN ON THESE STATES. NOW, IT'S NOT JUST MEDICAID BURDENS THAT ARE PLACED ON THESE STATES. THESE STATES ARE ALSO GOING TO HAVE TO PAY ADDITIONAL MEDICAID COSTS OR OTHER SOCIAL SERVICE COSTS, OTHER EDUCATION COSTS TO PAY FOR THE PEOPLE WHO ARE NOW COMING TO THEIR STATES AND WHO NEED HELP.

LET ME GIVE JUST A LITTLE BIT OF A FLAVOR OF WHAT THAT MEANS IN TERMS OF DOLLARS AND CENTS. LET'S TAKE THE STATE OF ARIZONA. THEY'RE SCHEDULED TO HAVE ABOUT A HALF A PERCENT REDUCTION. THAT'S ABOUT \$30 MILLION DROP IN PAYMENTS TO THE STATE OF ARIZONA FOR MEDICAID. WHICH IS NOW GOING TO PICK UP AT LEAST 2,000 MORE PEOPLE. THAT DOESN'T MAKE A LOT OF SENSE.

LET'S TAKE THE STATE OF NEVADA. ABOUT A 1.14% DROP IN FEDERAL PAYMENTS UNDER MEDICAID. THAT'S ABOUT \$14 MILLION FEWER DOLLARS THAT NEVADA'S GOING TO OTHERWISE RECEIVE. AND THEY'VE GOT TO PICK UP ABOUT 1,500 ADDITIONAL PEOPLE.

LET'S TAKE THE STATE OF OK OKLAHOMA, ALMOST A 2.25% REDUCTION. THAT'S ABOUT A \$66 BILLION REDUCTION AND ABOUT 4,000 PEOPLE AT LEAST THAT WE KNOW OF WHO ARE GOING TO BE LIVING TEMPORARILY AT LEAST IN OKLAHOMA AND WHO HAVE TO PICK UP THOSE OTHER COSTS.

SO ALL WE'RE SAYING IS IT DOES MAKE SENSE NOT TO LET THERE BE A REDUCTION. WE'RE NOT ASKING FOR AN IN INCREASE. WE'RE JUST SAYING NO REDUCTION IN FEDERAL PAYMENTS TO THE STATES AFFECTED. I MIGHT ADD THAT 25 OF THE 29 STATES ON THIS LIST ARE STATES WHERE THE PRESIDENT'S DECLARED A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY BECAUSE OF KATRINA. 25 OF THE 29 STATES ARE STATES WHERE THE PRESIDENT HAS DECLARED A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY INDICATING THAT THERE ARE ADDITIONAL PRESSURES ON THOSE STATES, ADDITIONAL PRESSURES ON THE PEOPLE IN THOSE STATES. WE'RE JUST TRYING TO PROVIDE SOME TEMPORARY HELP.

NOW, YOU HEAR SOMETIMES, WELL, THE ADMINISTRATION IS SUGGESTING A WAIVER. SENATORS HAVE MENTIONED THE PROBLEMS WITH THE WAIVER AND I'LL JUST VERY BRIEFLY LIST THEM. ONE IS THAT THE -- THAT THE WAIVER DOES NOT COVER A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO NEED CARE. MAJOR CATEGORY IS CHILDLESS ADULTS. IF YOU'RE A SINGLE MAN, A SINGLE WOMAN, YOU DON'T GET ADDITIONAL ANY COVERAGE HERE. THAT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE. IT DOES MAKE SENSE TO GIVE ASSISTANCE TO CHILDREN -- WOMEN WITH CHILDREN, BUT IT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE NOT TO GIVE ANY ASSISTANCE TO A SINGLE PERSON, A MAN OR A WOMAN? THAT'S THE EFFECT OF THE WAIVER THAT THE ADMINISTRATION IS TALKING ABOUT. WHY CREATE ALL THESE ADDITIONAL CONCEPTIONS? LET'S JUST SAY, AS THIS LEGISLATION DOES, OKAY, WE'RE GOING TO UTILIZE THIS MEDICAID SAFETY NET AND I DON'T CARE WHETHER YOU'RE A SINGLE PARENT, OLD OR WHAT, IF YOU DON'T HAVE THE INCOME, YOU'RE COVERED, WE'RE GOING TO HELP YOU OUT FOR FIVE MONTHS. WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT? DOESN'T THAT MAKE SENSE? TO ME, IT MAKES A LOT MORE SENSE.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO ADD TO THAT, THIS LEGISLATION IS STRONGLY SUPPORTED BY THE GOVERNOR IN THE STATES AFFECTED. IT'S BIPARTISAN. REPUBLICAN GOVERNORS,

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNORS. GOVERNOR RILEY OF ALABAMA WANTS THIS LEGISLATION. GOVERNOR BARBOUR OF MISSISSIPPI WANTS THIS LEGISLATION. GOVERNOR BLANCO OF LOUISIANA WANTS THIS LEGISLATION. REPUBLICANS, DEMOCRATS.

YOU KNOW, I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT, TOO, HEY, SENATORS AROUND HERE SAY, WELL, GEE, THE LOCAL PEOPLE KNOW WHAT THE NEEDS ARE. THE LOCAL PEOPLE KNOW BEST. WE IN CONGRESS, WE'RE TOO TOP-DOWN. WE ISSUE THESE ULTIMATUMS, WE PASS THIS LEGISLATION AND IT'S THE LOCAL PEOPLE THAT REALLY KNOW. MR. PRESIDENT, IT'S THE LOCAL PEOPLE THAT REALLY WANT THIS. IT'S THE LOCAL PEOPLE WHO ARE ASKING US FOR THIS. THE SENATORS FROM LOUISIANA BOTH ON [THIS AND] THE OTHER SIDE OF THE AISLE, THEY WANT THIS. SENATOR LOTT, SENATOR COCHRAN, THEY WANT THIS. SAME FOR THE SENATORS WITH -- IN ALABAMA. BOTH REPUBLICANS. THEY WANT THIS. THEY WANT THIS LEGISLATION. SAME WITH THE SENATORS FROM LOUISIANA. NOW, ONE'S REPUBLICAN, ONE A DEMOCRAT. THEY WANT THIS. I MENTION THE GOVERNORS WANT IT. THE DELEGATIONS, HOUSE DELEGATIONS WANT IT.

AND IT'S -- IT'S -- AGAIN, I REMIND MY COLLEAGUES, IT'S TEMPORARY. IT'S ONLY FOR FIVE MONTHS.

THEN LET'S GET INTO THE QUESTION OF UNCOMPENSATED CARE TO HOSPITALS. THIS LEGISLATION, AGAIN SCRUBBED, WORKED OVER, PROVIDES FOR \$800 MILLION OF UNCOMPENSATED CARE TO PROVIDERS IN THE STATES AFFECTED TO BE ADMINISTERED BY H.H.S. AND GRANTS TO THOSE UNCOMPENSATED -- FOR UNCOMPENSATED CARE FOR THOSE HOSPITALS. WHEREAS THE ADMINISTRATION SAYS, WELL, WE'LL -- WE'LL GIVE UNCOMPENSATED CARE IN WAIVERS. BUT WE'RE NOT SAYING HOW MUCH. WE'RE NOT SAYING HOW. IT'S JUST A PROMISE. I'M SAYING, YOU KNOW, IT'S DEEDS, MR. PRESIDENT, IT'S NOT WORDS. IT'S DEEDS.

I MIGHT ALSO ADD THAT THE WAIVER PROCESS THE ADMINISTRATION TALKS ABOUT AS ITS ALTERNATIVE HAS HUGE, BIG PROBLEMS ABOUT IT. TO BE HONEST ABOUT IT. WHAT ARE THEY? WELL, THE BASIC PROBLEM IS THIS. THE ADMINISTRATION SAYS OKAY, WE'LL MAKE YOU STATES WHOLE UNDER MEDICAID; THAT IS, YOU CHARGE US, THEN YOU BILL US, AND WE'LL PAY YOU. THERE'S A REAL QUESTION WHETHER THEY HAVE THE AUTHORITY UNDER THE LAW TO DO THAT. IT'S A HUGE ISSUE. IN FACT, JUST COMING TO WORK TODAY, I HEARD A GEORGE WASHINGTON PROFESSOR JUST TALK ABOUT THIS. SHE SAYS THEY CAN'T -- UNDER THE LAW, THEY CAN'T DO THAT. AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK'S GOING TO HAPPEN? SOME ARE GOING TO DUCK UNDER THIS WAIVER IDEA AND SAY OKAY, WE'LL MAKE YOU WHOLE, STATES, AND THEN THERE'S A BIG DEBATE OVER THE -- WHETHER LEGALLY THE ADMINISTRATION CAN DO THAT OR NOT AND IT . . . KIND OF FADES AWAY. AND GUESS WHAT? THESE STATES DON'T -- YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET IT. THESE HOSPITALS AREN'T GOING TO GET THAT EXTRA UNCOMPENSATED CARE EITHER.

AND ALL I'M SAYING IS THIS IS A QUICK, CERTAIN WAY. IT'S MEDICAID. WE ALL KNOW MEDICAID. WE KNOW THAT IT WORKS. THE PROVIDER NETWORKS ARE SET UP. THE PROCESS IS SET UP. THE PEOPLE ARE THERE. AND SO LET'S JUST RAISE THE INCOME LEVELS JUST A LITTLE BIT -- JUST A LITTLE BIT -- TEMPORARILY FOR FIVE MONTHS. LET'S GET ON WITH IT. RATHER THAN THIS VERY UNCERTAIN ADMINISTRATIVE IDEA OF WAIVERS AND WHAT THEY ARE, WHAT'S -- WHAT THEY CAN AND CANNOT DO.

WE'VE ALREADY ESTABLISHED UNDER THE LAW ONE THING THEY CANNOT DO, THEY CANNOT GIVE MEDICAID ASSISTANCE TO ALL THE CATEGORIES UNDER MEDICAID. THEY CAN JUST PICK AND CHOOSE A FEW. AND THOSE -- IN THAT CHOOSING, THERE'S DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WHO GETS AFFECTED WHO GETS HELP WHO DOES NOT -- WHO GETS HELP AND WHO DOES NOT. KATRINA SURVIVORS NEED TO KNOW, ARE THEY GOING TO GET HELP OR NOT?

THEY DON'T HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE ADDITIONAL WORRY OR NOT WHETHER OR NOT THEY'RE GOING TO GET HELP.

FINALLY, MR. PRESIDENT, I JUST -- I WOULD JUST LIKE TO SAY THAT THIS -- THIS QUESTION BEFORE US TO A LARGE DEGREE TESTS US AS A NATION, AS A PEOPLE, AS A SENATE, AS A CONGRESS. WHO ARE WE? WHAT DO WE STAND FOR? ARE WE GOING TO STAND HERE AND BICKER OVER MINUTE LITTLE DETAILS WHILE PEOPLE NEED HELP? ARE WE GOING TO BE KIND OF FEMA-LIKE AND JUST BE HESITANT AND NOT RESPOND IMMEDIATELY? WHAT SIGNAL DOES THAT SEND? WHAT SIGNAL DOES THAT SEND TO THE PEOPLE AFFECTED? WHAT SIGNAL DOES THAT SEND? . . .

THAT'S ONE OF THE REASON WE SHOULD GO THROUGH MEDICAID. THERE ARE ALREADY ANTIFRAUD PROVISIONS, PROTECTIONS SET UP UNDER MEDICAID TODAY. THAT'S ALREADY IN EXISTENCE. AND IT JUST SEEMS TO ME THAT IT'S PRETTY SIMPLE. IT DOESN'T TAKE ROCKET SCIENCE TO FIGURE THIS ONE OUT.

LET'S HELP THESE PEOPLE. LET'S DO IT NOW. AND WE'LL TAKE UP OTHER DISASTER ASSISTANCE MATTERS IN SUBSEQUENT WEEKS AND DAYS AND HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY THEN TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS THAT MAY OR MAY NOT SEEM NECESSARY. BUT AT THIS VERY MOMENT, AT THE VERY LEAST, LET'S PASS THIS LEGISLATION NOW.

AND MIGHT I SAY, BEFORE I FINISH, MR. PRESIDENT, WE'RE GOING TO PASS IT. WE ARE. AND I JUST -- OBVIOUSLY, IF YOU'RE GOING DO SOMETHING, YOU MIGHT AS WELL DO IT EARLIER THAN LATER AND GET ON WITH IT. I JUST HOPE THAT THE SENATORS WHO ARE OPPOSED TO THIS -- FOR REASONS I CAN'T FULLY UNDERSTAND -- FINALLY BEGIN TO SIT DOWN AND SAY, OKAY, SOMETIMES DISCRETION IS THE BETTER PART OF VALOR. LET'S JUST PASS THIS AND GET ON WITH IT. THANK YOU.

{2:01 pm}

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